Okimono

JAPANESE PORCELAIN FIGURES
FROM THE EDO PERIOD

置物

Jorge Welsh
WORKS OF ART

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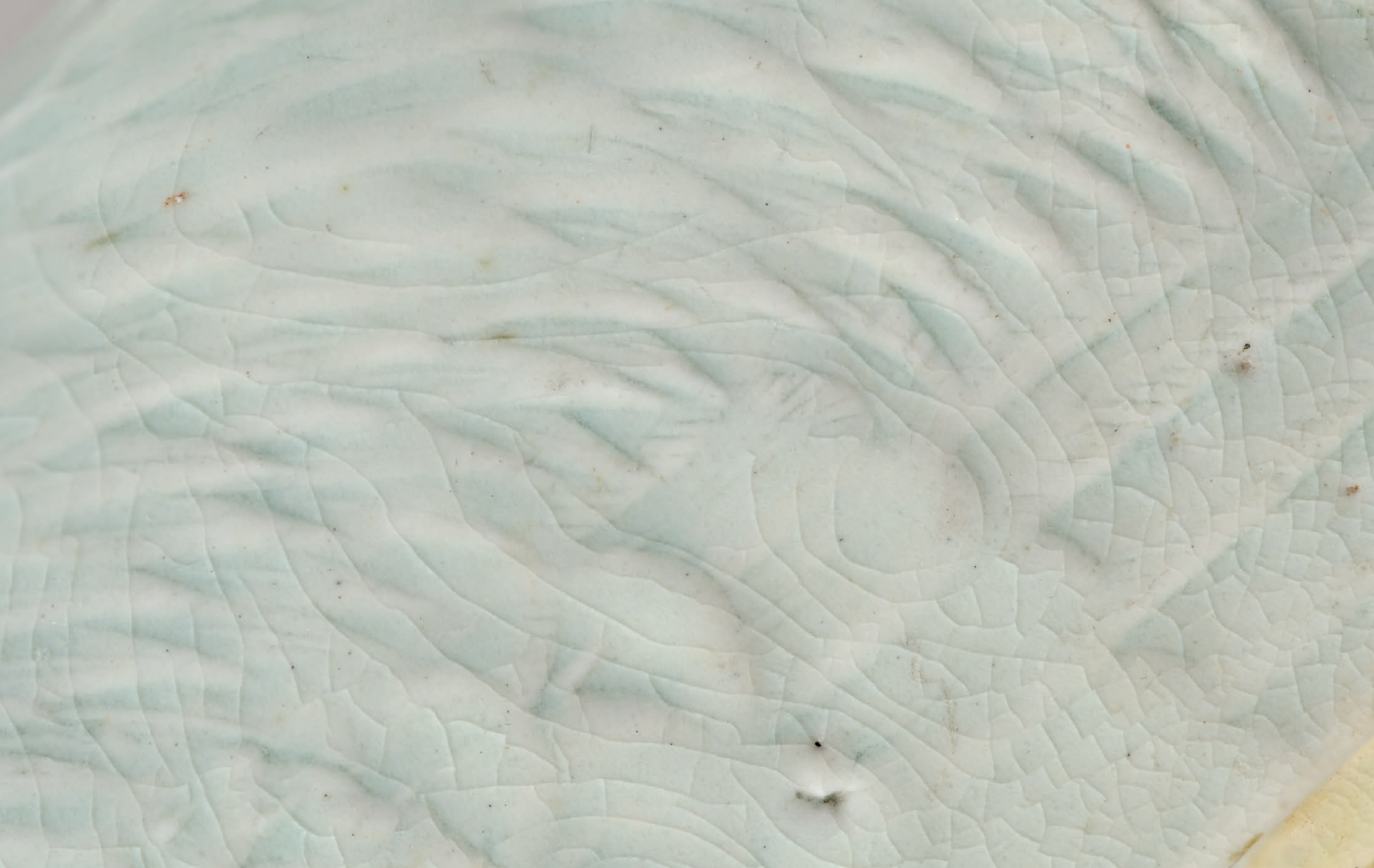


Foreword

Okimono: Japanese Porcelain Figures from the Edo Period is our first exhibition dedicated to Japanese porcelain. However, it has been long within our plans to organise such an exhibition, not only because of the unique beauty of these objects and the parallels with those being produced in China, but also because of its particular relevance in terms of the history of cross-cultural works of art and the maritime trade between Asia and the West.

As with previous exhibitions, we decided to focus our catalogue and exhibition on a particular theme, that of human and animal figures from the Edo period (1615-1868), more precisely from the 17th and 18th centuries. The exhibition comprises over 80 individual figures, of which 75 are discussed in the catalogue. It aims to be representative of export market production in Japan while questioning if some of these pieces were also destined for the domestic market.

Although the numbers of porcelains exported from Japan to Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries were much smaller than those exported from China, these objects were still greatly appreciated in the West, having made their way into a wide sphere of collections around Europe. The most well-known early collections to include Japanese porcelains are the Augustus the Strong Collection, presently housed in the Zwinger in Dresden, Germany and the Burghley House Collection in Stamford, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom — two unmissable destinations for anyone interested in this field. But these porcelains were collected widely, along with Chinese porcelains, and were present in many other European private collections and later in museums across the world.

Remarkably, unlike Chinese porcelain, which has been the subject of vast research and countless publications, the study of Japanese porcelain has been limited and has left too many questions unanswered. In the West there have only been a few scholars who have dedicated serious attention to this field, these include Oliver Impey, John Ayers, Filip Suchomel, Menno Fitski and the author of the introductory text to his catalogue, Christiaan Jörg, who continues to be one of the leading figures in the study of both Chinese and Japanese works of art. Publications are also scarce, aside from those by some of the authors named above. Furthermore, nomenclature and opinions about different aspects of the production of these porcelains vary between Western and Japanese scholars. Even production places of some Japanese porcelains are up for discussion, as is the clear defining of the markets for which some of the objects, such as the figures included in this catalogue and exhibition, were made for. Some reasons for the lack of research may be the limited number of verifiable records available to scholars. If one excludes records from the VOC, and the detailed early inventories from a relatively small number of collections such as Burghley's and Augustus the Strong's, not much else is available. In fact, in many of the early inventories, all Asian porcelain was described as 'Chinese', or even 'Indian' (referring to the European East India trade companies), making it almost impossible to identify the Japanese examples.

Further study is also needed into how Japanese porcelains influenced other porcelain productions. The cross influences between Chinese and Japanese porcelains are obvious, as are those on European porcelain such as Meissen. It is often argued that Japanese figures of animals might have influenced the large monochromatic early Meissen examples created by Johann Joachim Kändler, yet no Japanese prototypes have been recorded that could fit the purpose. A few years ago, we sold a massive Japanese porcelain stag, illustrated on page 128 of this catalogue, similar in size and colour to the early Meissen animal figures. In this catalogue, entry number 18, we discuss another massive figure of an elephant shaped incense holder burner. These seem to be the only two Japanese figures of this massive size so far recorded, both found in Europe, more precisely in England. Although some have claimed that figures such as these could have been the ones influencing the Meissen examples, so far, no evidence to that effect has been found. Nor is there any record of similar figures in the Augustus the Strong Collection. However, it is true that there are some unavoidable parallels in terms of their massive size and colour schemes. No other figures of this type and magnitude are known in the West or Japan and their date of manufacture is what one would expect for any figures that may have influenced the Kändler ones. Independently from any eventual relationship being established between these figures and the early Meissen's, we hope that further research may yet shed some light onto what are two of the most magnificent Japanese porcelain figures we have ever come across.

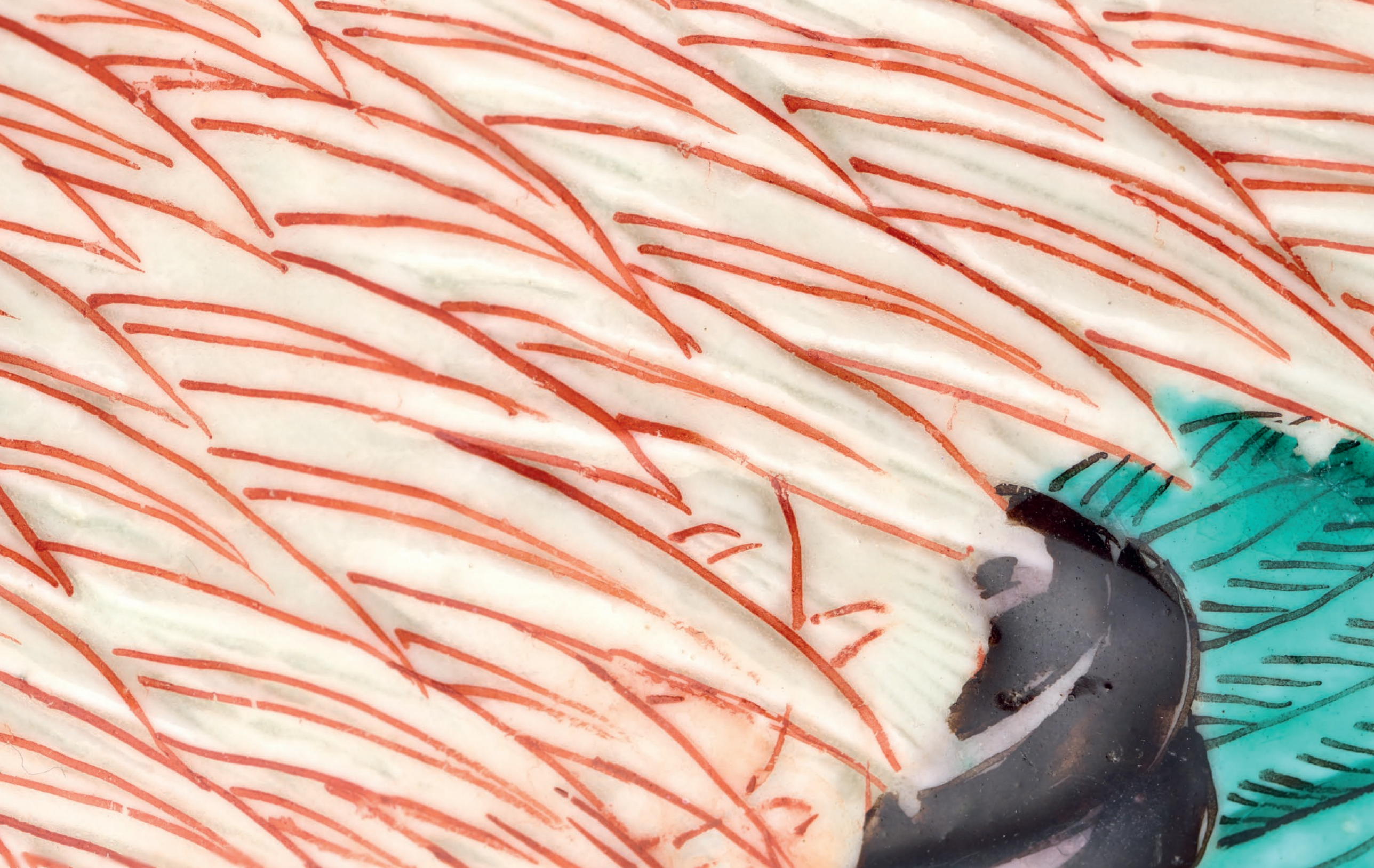
As is usual with our exhibitions, we try to make the most of what are, in effect, commercial gallery exhibitions, using these opportunities to try to further the understanding of particular themes while also encouraging others to study and share with us their findings. We hope that the group of pieces we have brought together for our 2022 exhibition, together with the information found in this catalogue, in particular the most interesting article by Christiaan Jörg, may generate interest in what are some of the most interesting porcelain figures ever produced.

Luísa Vinhais
Jorge Welsh

Chronology

Jōmon period	12,500—400 BCE
Yayoi period	400 BCE—300 CE
Kofun period	third–sixth century
Asuka period	552—710
Nara period	710—794
Heian period	794—1185
Kamakura period	1185—1333
Muromachi period	1333—1573
Nanbokuchō period	1333—1392
Momoyama period	1573—1615
Bunroku era	1592—1596
Keichō era	1596—1615

Edo period	1615—1868
Kan'ei era	1624—1644
Kanbun era	1661—1673
Enpō era	1673—1681
Tenna era	1681—1684
Jōkyō era	1684—1688
Genroku era	1688—1704
Hōreki era	1751—1764
Kansei era	1789—1801
Bunka era	1804—1818
Bunsei era	1818—1830
Tenpō era	1830—1844
Meiji era	1868—1912
Taishō era	1912—1926
Shōwa era	1926—1989
Heisei era	1989—2019
Reiwa era	2019—present



Japanese Porcelain Figures

BY CHRISTIAAN J. A. JÖRG

FIG. 1

Square tiered box with a company of tiny figures on top, Japanese porcelain, Arita, Imari style, 1690–1710, H. 14 cm. Porzellansammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, registered in the 1721 Inventory, modern inv. no. PO 499. PHOTO ADRIAN SAUER.

INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to provide a context for the Japanese porcelain figures illustrated in this catalogue. It is not a survey of different types of human and animal statuettes and their decorations, nor a discussion of different kilns.[1] It will also not address miniature figures, such as groups drinking tea on the covers of boxes (Fig. 1), nor explore finials shaped as humans, or as animals such as *shishi*, rabbits and others. Instead, I intend to focus on historical questions, starting with a concise overview of trade at the time, and continuing with the sparse documentation that exists concerning the presence of figures in early European collections. Based on the available evidence, I will conclude by asking whether there was a market for these figures in Japan at the time.

[1] For a general overview of Japanese porcelain figures, see, for example, Oliver Impey, 'Figures from Japan. A Survey of Export Porcelain Figures of the Late 17th and 18th Centuries. Part 1: Animals', in *Ceramics. The International Journal of Ceramics and Glass*, July/August 1986; Filip Suchomel and Marcela Suchomelova, *Mistrovska dila Japonského Porcelanu*, Prague, 1997 (with separate English translation of texts and captions), pp. 89–97; *Kakiemon. The Whole Aspect of the Kakiemon*, exhibition catalogue, The Kyushu Ceramic Museum, Arita, 1999, pp. 42–57, cat. nos. 51–75: Filip Suchomel, 'Figural porcelain from the Kakiemon workshop and its decoration', in *Kokusai shimpojiiuma — Kakiemon yoshiki jiki no fuhensei nitsuite*, Fukuoka Sangyo Daigaku, Fukuoka, 2007, pp. 21–31.

JAPAN AND THE VOC

The Manchu conquest of China and the replacement of the Ming dynasty by the Qing in 1644 created turmoil and civil wars. As a result, the porcelain industry in Jingdezhen faced difficulties in production, and transport to the coast and large-scale porcelain exports came to an end. To maintain supply, the VOC shifted its attention to Japan where the company had established a trading settlement on Deshima, an artificial island in Nagasaki Bay, in 1641 (Fig. 2). A short distance to the north, the porcelain kilns in Arita had produced porcelain for the domestic market since the early 17th century, but due to the shortage of Chinese porcelain in South East Asia after 1645, they had started exporting as well. The Dutch made good use of this alternative supply and the company regularly ordered porcelain from these kilns from the late 1650s to the early 1680s.[5]

Japanese porcelain was an instant success in The Netherlands. A major factor was the decoration in bright overglaze enamel colours, which was something new after half a century of imported Chinese porcelains decorated almost exclusively in underglaze blue.

Although underglaze cobalt-blue is also used for decorations on Japanese porcelain, it was the polychrome wares with overglaze enamel decorations that made the difference. In the West we distinguish two main varieties: Kakiemon and Imari. The first is named after a family of potters in Nangawara, whose kilns were located on the outskirts of Arita, which since the late 1640s had specialised in making ceramics decorated with overglaze enamels, including silver and gold. Their red, yellow, green, aubergine, overglaze blue and black enamels are saturated and delicately painted, especially during their best period, ca. 1670–90. To complicate matters, other kilns in Arita often imitated their colour scheme, compounding the challenges involved in distinguishing true Kakiemon from Kakiemon-style pieces. Furthermore, less refined enamelled wares from the 1660s and 1670s are sometimes named 'early enamels', and an appropriate nomenclature is still being discussed. Finally, it has to be said that the Kakiemon kilns also produced underglaze-blue porcelains and wares, painted with a combination of underglaze blue and enamels. All of this highlights that the Kakiemon kilns exerted a major influence on export wares.

Imari is named after the export harbour the Arita potters used on the west coast of Kyushu, but it was not a place of production. These wares are usually painted with underglaze blue, overglaze red, gold and occasionally some black or green enamels, although more elaborate examples are also known, while there are also varieties without underglaze blue. Imari is often densely painted with intricate patterns, which appealed to Europeans and suited the Baroque taste of the period.

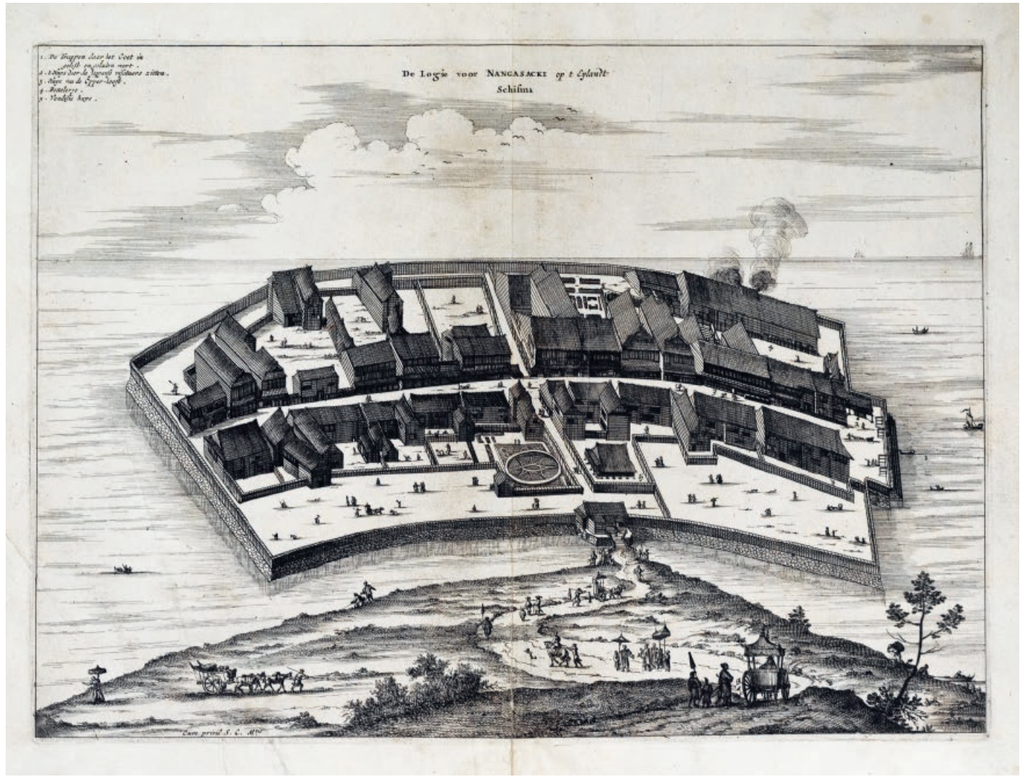


FIG. 2

Bird's-eye view of Deshima, copper engraving from Arnoldus Montanus, *Gedenkwaerdige Gesantschappen der Oost-Indische Maetschappy in't Vereenigde Nederland, aen de Kaisaren van Japan*, Amsterdam, 1669.

[5] For the detailed lists of porcelain shipped to The Netherlands, see Cynthia Viallé, 'Chronology of shipments of Japanese porcelain exported to the Netherlands by the Dutch East India Company', in *The Voyage of Old-Imari Porcelain*, exhibition catalogue, The Kyushu Ceramic Museum, Arita, 2000, pp. 197–205.

Overview

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Water Dropper with Rooster on a Trunk
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Figure of a Lady
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2 Rooster

Porcelain decorated in overglaze polychrome enamels and gold

Japan — Edo period (1615–1868), late 17th to early 18th century

H. 21 L. 16 W. 10.5 cm

A figure in the shape of a rooster, with its head slightly raised and turned to the side, with bulging and alert eyes, a modelled crown and wattle, an open beak to show its tongue, finely incised plumage, wings to the side, an upturned and incised feather tail, and its feet attached to an irregularly shaped base. It is painted in overglaze polychrome enamels and gold, with the crown and wattle painted in red, the beak in gold, the feet with remnants of gold, the head in a light orange enamel, and the plumage occasionally decorated with splotches of black, red and aubergine over the white glazed body and chest. The wings are outlined to simulate plumage and painted green, aubergine and red. The feathers of the tail are also outlined in red and decorated sporadically with red, aubergine and black splotches, as is the base. The inside of the figure and the base are unglazed.

12 Tiger

Kakiemon porcelain decorated in overglaze polychrome enamels

Japan — Edo period (1615–1868), 1670-1700

H. 17 L. 18.5 W. 11 cm

PROVENANCE

Alice and Murray Brownfield Collection

The James E. Sowell Collection

A moulded and modelled figure of a sitting tiger, leaning forward and its head slightly turned to the right, with bulging eyes, raised ears, mouth showing sharp teeth, and a long tail rising upwards. It is decorated in overglaze polychrome enamels, with its belly left white and its body covered in a bright-yellow enamel painted with black stripes to simulate fur. The facial features are heightened with red enamel, including the eyebrows, nose, ears, and mouth.

The tiger (*tora*) is not native to Japan. It was first introduced to the Japanese imaginary through Zen Buddhism of the Nara period (710–794), so the beliefs surrounding the animal are similar in both countries. In Buddhism, the tiger represents the power of faith, courage and physical strength.[1] It also signifies the West and autumn, being considered the opposite of the dragon, with both symbolising the duality of the universe.[2]

Living tigers are thought to have been displayed in Japan only on rare ceremonial occasions, as suggested by depictions of caged animals in the *rakuchu rakugai* (scenes of in and around Kyoto) screens of the Kano School.[3] These rare tigers were probably imported from Korea to be added to private menageries.[4] Nevertheless, images of stylised tigers with a fanciful Japanese aesthetic became a regular motif in Japanese paintings, porcelain, netsukes and lacquers (Fig. 37).

13

Pair of Lion Dogs

Kakiemon porcelain decorated in overglaze polychrome enamels; metal mounts

Japan — Edo period (1615–1868), 1670–1690

H. 18 L. 18 W. 10 cm

A pair of moulded and modelled lion dogs or *shishi*, each in a sitting position on a rectangular flat base fitted onto neoclassical metal mounts, with one paw resting on a ball, the head slightly turned to one side, mouth open showing pointy teeth and tongue, a collar with a bell around its neck tied at the back with a knot, incised and moulded curls over its back, and around its head and eyes, and a raised tail. Both dogs are painted in shades of blue, light yellow and red, with the back and tail painted blue, the sides and legs decorated with alternating blue and yellow dots, the chest painted in tones of yellow, and details such as the nostrils, mouth and collar painted red. The balls are painted in a light-green tone and decorated at the centre with flames pencilled in red on a wide band, reserved in white.

Jorge Welsh
Works of Art

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Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon

Museu Quinta das Cruzes, Funchal

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Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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Shanghai Museum, Shanghai

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2021

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2020

The Porcelain Room, *Chinese Export Porcelain,* Fondazione Prada, Milan

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Research & Publishing

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